



RR

VOLUME 59 ISSUE 1

melodrama.

Photo by Shriya Chunduri

**RUTGERS
REVIEW**

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Melodrama, our fall feature, emerged from a restless, all-consuming feminist vigor seeking to reimagine womanhood. Why Melodrama? You may ask. The prefix “melo” has its origin in the Greek language—it refers to melody. The suffix “drama” encourages the undermining of the phenomena it is used to describe. Consider the word melodramatic— google associates it with words like exaggeration, overdone, and worse, overemotional. Words that are often reshaped as insults toward women. We want to deconstruct this conceptualization. And deep down, we always knew our theme was to be centered on womanhood— pink with glitters, sparkles, and femininity.

It was, frankly, impossible to think about anything else. 2023 has ensured this. Taylor Swift’s Eras Tour barreled into our lives with a literal earthquake, friendship bracelets, and her awe-inspiring 3-hour performance. Renaissance electrified stadiums filled with devoted Beyonce fans. Pink was trending again thanks to our wonderful Barbie (I was very pleased). Halle Bailey’s Part of Your World is my new favorite version of the iconic Little Mermaid song. And let’s not forget Rutgers Review’s all women e-board! The undeniable magic and collaborative spirit of this wonderful crew led to our newest creation.

If we combine the roots, melo and drama, we get a dramatic performance with sensational characters, music, and dialogue. A perfect description of this issue. Inside, you will find artwork ranging from paintings to ineffable short pieces. You will find music. You will find laughter You will find inexplicable joy. But most importantly, you will find melodrama as we see it. We hope you get invigorated by this body of work as much as we did by making it.

-Sahana Iyer

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photo by Kyle Handojo

The Brutality of Belonging

BY SUHANI GHARIA

Uncapped lipsticks, cakey makeup brushes, different hued eyeshadow palettes, mascara tubes, and sticky glosses lay strewn across the teenage girl's dresser.

Strung behind her are maxi dresses, mini dresses.

Corsets and band tees lie in the closet, on the floor, or sprawling on the bed. She is trying to be everything at once—a 'tomato girl', a 'coastal grandmother', while still balancing balletcore, y2k, softcore, and every other aesthetic championed by the various corners of the internet. No longer does she shop for herself, act for herself, or think for herself. Her quest for beauty and identity has led to a massacre of self. Beauty and belonging in the age of social media's micro trends requires contortion of the

self until it disappears, forgoing the traditional process of aesthetic's role in identity and maturing.

An ever changing status quo is nothing new to society, however, the rapidity with which it changes in today's world is unprecedented and in an effort to keep up, people are tearing themselves down and rebuilding themselves to fit the mold of whichever micro trend has garnered public favor. Changes to one's aesthetic is natural, it follows growth and self knowing, but something about today's marketing of aesthetic and growth feels disingenuous (if possible, more than it already was).

With trends of the past, there was time for a natural

progression to something new. More importantly, each trend was often rooted in something that mattered. For example, women's fashion in the 1950s was characterized by more ornate, billowing dresses and skirts that were cinched at the waist. This was a stark difference to the more modest silhouettes of the 40s, a change spurred by departure from wartime. Trends like this were grounded in societal movements and usually had a decade of buffer time until the next trend. The influence of the internet and increased accessibility of garments and accessories because of fast fashion has dramatically shortened the length of a trend cycle today. This phenomenon is so extreme that the trend "micro-trend" is now being used to more accurately describe fashion frenzies.

Blueberry nails, skunk stripes, and micro mini skirts flood our feeds. In the whiplash of trying to keep up, the teenage girl—historically most susceptible to fluctuations in the status quo—changes herself rapidly. She bleaches her fingers with acetone in an effort to scrub off the crackle nail polish of last week and plasters on

'blueberry' acrylics to match her new blue ballet flats for fall. She cleans out the gorp core puffer coats of the past and makes room for wool trenches for this fall. Fashion brands have never been better off. They have a constant supply of customers who are buying for the current trend, insuring that they'll be back soon. This feedback loop traps the consumer in the cycle of reidentifying themselves aesthetically. In the pursuit of "staying on trend", one loses themselves. Aesthetic is intended to be a deeply intimate curation—it is honed through trial, error, and





exploration. In theory, the rapidity with which we blow through trends today should allow for more exploration and an eventual 'aesthetic awakening' of sorts. People should be trying these trends in an effort to see what makes them most comfortable and what suits their personalities. This is not the case, however, as individuals are lost in the blur of a constantly changing aesthetic benchmark, pushed by social media and advertisements. This is especially worrisome in the case of teenage girls because their stage in adolescence is meant for experimentation. It is when individuals develop the unique facets of their personality that often blossom into deeper traits as they mature. This process of experimentation is being dwarfed by the constant pressure of

keeping up with tomorrow's next big thing. This suffocating standard contributes to an ultimate loss of self and a surrender to the masses.

Trends are not going to go away. There will always be someone pushing a one-thousand dollar sweater from Loewe with "the softest yarn you've ever felt in your life" and that's a "must need for this winter". There will always be the dupes from H&M and Zara (and of course Shein) that are peddled by influencers through Tik Tok and Instagram reels. The only way to combat the guerilla warfare launched by fashion brands through their unrelenting marketing schemes is an increased societal emphasis on the value of exploration and knowing one's self.

ZINES: THE PUNK PUBLICATION

By Katerina Basuel

While perusing the dusty shelves of a seaside thrift store a year ago, I came upon a carousel of disorganized pamphlets, the multicolored papers flittering and fluttering, and threatening to fall with every turn of the squeaky, creaky carousel. Going for one to five dollars a pop, these papers were emblazoned with titles such as, “The Very Real History of Sliced Bread”, “Black Dots: An Afropunk Primer”, “Gender’s a Performance and I’ve Got Stage Fright”, “How to Make a Lemon Meringue Pie Without Your Mom”, and even just simply “Tomatoes”.

These pamphlets are what are known as “zines” (and dear reader, be sure to pronounce it ZEENS, lest you be heralded a poser). Zines are small, independently published, underground, DIY, mini magazines. They are a way to spread lesser-known information and uplift marginalized voices, while also being a fun creative outlet. The range of topics is wide, including but not limited





to: art, political theory, queer liberation, cooking, poetry, sexual health, comics, feminism, books and shows, diy, etc.

Usually around 5-40 pages long and hand-crafted, zines give an audience to content often considered “unpublishable” by corporate standards for being too political, too specific, too personal, or too strange. Because of their unpublishable nature, they are frequently humorous and tongue-in-cheek, acknowledging that sometimes the subjects are niche and high-pointless, and that they’re good and fun for that fact. It is in the embracing of

individuality that zines find their charm. If the zine isn’t for profit and you don’t have to appeal to a large audience, then it can be about anything at all, allowing the zinester to shake free from their constraints and shamelessly discuss what they care about.

Zines also have a rich political history by being such an accessible form of grassroots publication. We can trace their functional lineage through history, even to the reformation pamphlets of Martin Luther. The word “zine” in its modern usage began in 1930, with the creation of the science fiction fanzine *The Comet*. The first queer zine *Vice Versa* was created in 1947 by Edythe Eyde under the pen name Lisa Ben (an anagram of ‘lesbian’). One of the most well-known zines was a Star Trek fanzine published in 1967 by the name of “Spockanalia”, in which Star Trek fans drew art, discussed theories, and wrote fanfiction of Kirk and Spock, disseminating these oh-so scandalous publications through exclusive mailing lists.



Indeed, we have bored housewives and zines to thank for modern fan culture. Viva La Fanfiction!

Zines reached their heyday in the punk movements of the 70s-90s following the popularity of copy shops, finding particular prominence in the feminist riot grrrl scene. In fact, the 1976 zine simply titled *Punk* helped to cement the term “punk” as the name of this music genre. These zines argued for non-conformity, anti-authoritarianism, anti-capitalism, direct action, community, and “sticking it to the man”, pushing forward both the politics and art of the culture. Kathleen Hanna, lead singer of the bands Bikini Kill and Le Tigre, penned the zine *Bikini Kill Zine*, in which the prominent *Riot Grrrl Manifesto* was published. Resisting against a male-dominated punk scene, the manifesto proudly proclaimed that their zine existed “BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will change the world for real.”



Though not as widespread as they once were, zines still have a place in our modern world. Some zines are now digitized on websites or can be bought online, while others are still circulated through local scenes. To find them, check thrift stores, publishing fairs, record and book stores, local concerts, online stores/archives, or just ask your friendly neighborhood punk. Or better yet, bust out the printer paper, find a youtube tutorial, pick a topic, and make your own zine! Many people find themselves gravitating towards zines in an age where so often it can feel like large corporations are censoring individuals online, and what is written can so quickly be erased from the internet if they “age out” of relevancy.



Although some people might view the physically printed word as obsolete, take a look at the magazine you're reading right now! (If you are reading this online, kindly ignore the previous assumptions of the author and perhaps consider acquiring a physical copy of your very own). Consider how incredible it is that nowadays it is considered common to read and write, when for millennia that was a skill restricted to the upper class. If the modern world has screwed us over in so many other ways, at least it is a world where almost everybody has access to paper, a pen, and the ability to write down our thoughts. Admittedly, the seriousness of newspaper print and the glossiness of a magazine cover can be intimidating (the author is aware of the irony of this statement). Zines, on the other hand, demand no such censoring of self. Zines meet you where you are and ask, "What would you like to talk about? Yes, you can draw a smiley face on the corner." So ignore the naysayers and the pesky buzzing bug of a critic in your head, pick up that pen, and just write.



CAREER FAIRS ARE THE CRINGIEST THING

EVER!

By Yvonne Yuqing Liu

The Grace Hopper Conference was held this past September in Florida. Even though I'm not a woman in STEM, I was concerned about this embarrassing event. As with all career fairs, people are desperate. Literally. A "women in stem ONLY" career fair with so many men in the work-force. In today's life-consuming and soul-crushing job market, even patriarchal heirs are bowing their heads.

Seriously, every single career fair is a cringy fraud.

Can you imagine your classmate from yesterday wearing hoodies and slippers to class and playing browser games during lectures, now all dolled up in suits and talking all professional to those bald-head recruiters in vests — it's always the vests. This might be one of those scenarios in life where you feel like you don't belong, but you end up there anyways. The cringe climbs into every cell of your body.

Where does it come from? The second I stepped into the Jersey Mike's Arena for a career fair, I felt like I was swallowed by the crowd who were either pretentious professionals or professional wannabes. "I am NOT ready for this," said a voice in my head.

But printed out my resume, so I gave it a try. As you can imagine, I wouldn't be here writing this post if I actually got anything out of it. None of the resumes I prepared were given out. Aside from the fact that almost all the booths tell you to scan the QR code to submit your resume, almost nobody is hiring arts and humanities majors. If you're unfortunate enough to be a journalism major like me, you're going to find that you're just a marginalized person who can't fit in in this mega studio. This society is murdering humanities in the name of utilitarianism.

Throughout the fair, I wondered if I was not extroverted enough. Perhaps, I was undergoing imposter syndrome. But if anyone says the same thing to you just because you didn't connect with any employer at a career fair, tell them to shut the f*** up. Employers at career fairs don't actually even care about you (as an individual) when they are surrounded by a bunch of students who are very desperate for internships and jobs (or in other words, money). The job market has been overly saturated for a long time now, and they would never actually give you an opportunity at a career fair. They only come to the career fair to cooperate with the school's career service department and act as if they care about the students' career development.

Honestly I don't even know what I should do at this point. I'm graduating in May next year. When people ask me how I feel about graduating, I joyfully say, "I'm finally getting outta here." But I'm also anxious. I'm afraid that I won't be able to find a job after graduation, just like I got nothing at the career fair. When I look at my peers' #InternshipReflection posts on LinkedIn or them celebrating their success, I feel very under accomplished. People go to career fairs because the job world online has already turned them down, but even that last hope turns out to be a joke. Peer pressure used to be everyone smoking and drinking at parties, and trying to be a cool kid. Now it's that everyone is intoxicated on a type of drug called "success" at career fairs.

I know I'm being cynical and hysterical here, but if you ask me about my plans after graduation, I probably would just give you a random answer. But just don't trust it because I sound assertive. I have no idea about my future.



The art of catching crowdsurfers

By Sage Short

My friends say I'm a junkie. No, not the kind you're probably thinking. I'm a concert-junkie. It's one of the many names I've adopted over the years. People call me VIP slob, barricade rider, FRDC bitch (which means "front-row-dead-center" bitch), but most people say I'm just crazy. If I told you any of the stories of my 10-hour waits on stone sidewalks in below-freezing temperature or my 7-hour drive to Pittsburg with a stranger, or if I describe the feeling of going 15 to 20 hours without a bathroom break, I bet you'd agree. Maybe I am a little crazy. The dehydration, the hunger, the sweat, the smell, the closeness, the chaos, the crowd surfers—why would someone subject themselves to that?

Personally, I think it's the same reason people run marathons. It's a rush of endorphins. A place to scream your sorrows from the pit

of your stomach to your favorite song and dance until you no longer want to stand, but know that you still can. The adrenaline rush is unimaginable. For me, that moment, amidst the crowd, it's where I feel the most alive. A room full of strangers who come together for the love of music. We could have been anywhere, but we decided to be there. Together. At that moment. It's like a big party where everyone knows the same songs as you.

But don't get me wrong. It can be a little intimidating sometimes. If you saw me, 5'4 if I stand on my toes, you'd think I'd get crushed, swept beneath the feet of moshers and metalheads. And maybe you're right. I was never a fan of slam dancing. As a barricade rider, I'm on the front lines. I'm the current that carries the crowd surfers over the rail. The wave that rolls them to shore. It's one of those subjectively useless skills I've got down to a science.

How to catch crowdsurfers

FOR NEWBIES

BY SAGE SHORT

Be prepared:

It's very unlikely for them to come out of nowhere.

Listen to the people around you because there will usually be an alert as soon as one is noticed. Even if they aren't very close.

Your hands:

Imagine you're playing volleyball, keep your hands above your head until the ball (the person) is no longer on your side.



How to stand :

Even without a crowdsurfer, an unstable stance can knock you down. Keep your feet apart with a little bend on both knees. Just enough to stay stable but not enough to tire yourself out.

Personally, I like to turn around, with my back towards the stage instead of trying to reach blindly behind me.

Photo by @PullTheTriggerBrittPhotography



DO

DON'T

1

Guide them.

Catching crowd surfers isn't about "lifting", it's about creating a flat enough surface for them to ride the "wave" over your hands



Get underneath?

Getting directly underneath them puts too much pressure on you. There's no need to lift them direct over your head.

2

Watch out.

Make sure you always know where their feet are. If you can get ahold of their ankles, do it. If not, be mindful of their feet.



DUCK?

What happens if a car driving on a straight road hits a pothole? If you duck, you become the inside of that pothole.

3

Hands forward.

Bring your hands forward, not directly above your head. Get in front of the crowd-surfer, never directly under them.



Feel nervous?

It's not about being strong enough, it's about stability. And if you are stable, they're not going to fall on you.

4

Trust yourself.

Believe in yourself, but know your limit. If it's not an enjoyable experience or you find yourself getting hurt, step out of the crowd.



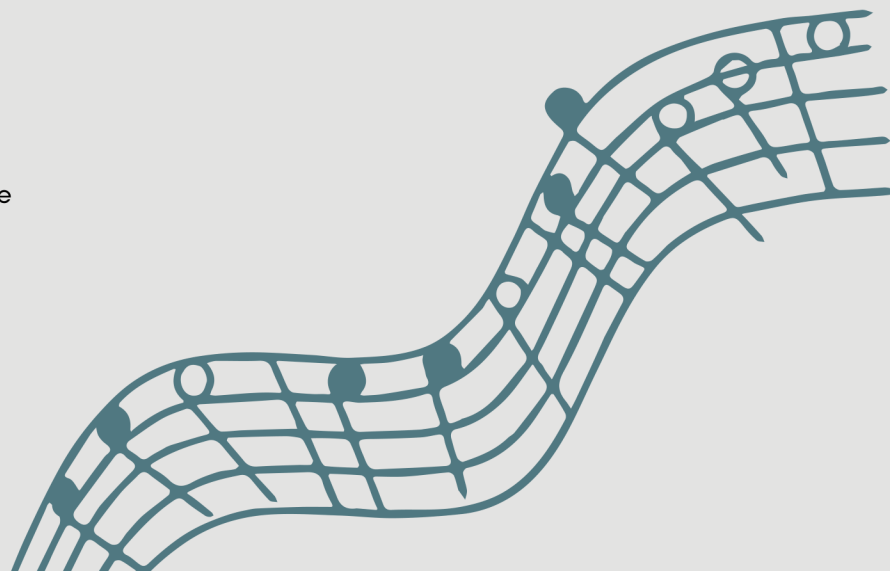
Cover your head?

The first instinct of many when they duck, is to cover their heads. This will only lead them falling on you. Keep your hands up!

5

Choose a spot.

If catching crowdsurfers are your thing, the front is your spot! If it's not your thing, the back and the sides are for you!





arts&ent

"Loss of Iris Fleur" by Vanessa Nuckols

THE HAUNTING OF LUCY GRAY



BY SAGE SHORT

Adapted from the 2020 novel, *A Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* was released on Thanksgiving 2023. The film and book are a prequel to the Hunger Games trilogy following then-18-year-old Coriolanus Snow and his relations with a tribute from District 12, whom he mentored during the 10th Annual Hunger Games. Snow falls in love with Lucy Gray and breaks the rules of the Games to protect her from losing her life. As punishment for cheating, when Snow is exiled to work as a Peacekeeper, he bribes a clerk to position him at District 12 so that he may be close to Lucy Gray, who won the Games because of his assistance. At the film's close, Lucy Gray disappears and is never seen in Panem again.

In the film, the day Lucy Gray disappears, she leaves Snow to pick Katniss's roots from the water bank the pair had harvested earlier. Whether she has fled from fear of the villain she knows Snow to be or was abducted in the woods and killed, he is bittered by their separation and believes that the world should burn because he no longer has the woman he claimed to love. He continues working closely with the Games and is responsible for their continuation. It isn't until the 74th Annual Hunger Games, when Katniss Everdeen takes her sister's place during the reaping, that Snow faces the spirit of Lucy Gray again within Katniss, who fights to take down the Capitol and restore freedom to Panem.

**SPOILER
ALERT**



THE BALLAD OF SONGBIRDS AND SNAKES



In *A Ballad of Snakes and Songbirds*, Lucy Gray introduced Snow to the Mockingjay, a District 12 bird crossbreed between a male Jabberjay and a female Mockingbird, while he worked as a Peacekeeper in District 12. At the film's close, the Mockingjays fly overhead as Snow hunts for Lucy with a gun he's found when he notices she's disappeared. The Mockingjay's taunt Snow, continuing to whistle a song Lucy had written about a man murdered in District 12 when Snow first arrived.

These birds would become a symbol during the rebellion, matching the pin Katniss had worn in the games. During the uprisings, her followers called her "the Mockingjay." As referred to in the song "The Hanging Tree," the tree becomes a meeting place for Snow and Lucy Gray, where they met before running away together. Snow encounters

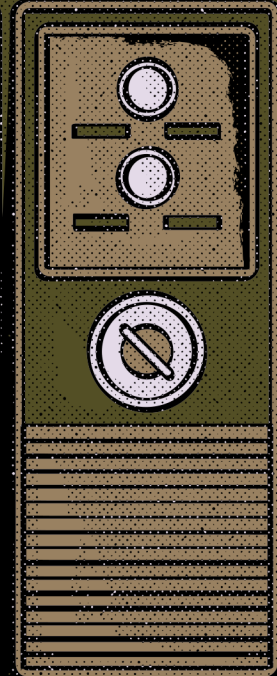


this song in *Mockingjay*, Part 1, when it becomes the anthem for the rebellion led by Katniss.

After years of abhorrence and oppression by Snow's hand, Panem is freed at the end of *Mockingjay*, Part 2. When Katniss manages to take governance from him, as Katniss looks him in the face, Lucy Gray does as well, damning him to never forget her.

THÉRÈSE

by Ryann Iannotti



Maya Hawke's song, "Thérèse", references French artist Balthus's painting, titled "Thérèse Dreaming," which depicts a young girl with one leg on a chair and the other hanging off, her foot resting on the floor. Crucial to the understanding of the painting's controversy and its relation to Hawke's song is the detail of her skirt naturally shifting up her leg, revealing her underwear. Because of the nature of the girl's posture combined with the artist's history of using prepubescent girls in his art, many have accused Balthus of harboring sexual attraction to his young models.

But why does being able to see her underwear subject her to sexualization? Why is the way she's sitting inherently sexual? Why do we as a society perceive it as such? "Thérèse" highlights society's propensity to sexualize women and to evade accountability for their corrupt thoughts. She makes the assertion that people blame the subject they're sexualizing for provoking those thoughts rather than trying to understand the nature and origin of their own cognition.

The first few lines of the lyrics characterize Therese, the girl in the painting, as any ordinary child. For example, Hawke depicts experiences and thoughts a young girl would be expected to possess through the lines "wishing she was older" and "dreaming" of a horse or car to escape her dependence. By establishing Therese as a normal, young girl, Hawke emphasizes the idea that her existence—regardless of whether or not her underwear is visible—is not innately sexual. That, instead, perceiving the painting to be sexual is more a reflection of one's own disposition than it is a representation of the painting's meaning. If Balthus was harboring inappropriate feelings toward the children—the girls—that he painted, *Therese Dreaming* serves both as a representation of the all-too-common instance of men (Balthus) exploiting women (the subject of the painting) and as a criticism of what society deems sexual.



In reality, the discomfort many people feel from viewing "*Therese Dreaming*" originates from their inclination to sexualize a little girl. In turn, instead of reflecting on the root of the corrupt thought and recognizing that subconscious (and ingrained) patriarchal beliefs taint their perceptions, people often display a defensive response that exhibits how they would choose to remove what makes them uncomfortable before learning to confront the uncomfortable and accept it for what it is. If you've watched the music video, this idea is clearly reflected through the individuals being stowed away and detained by the officers with flashlights. Most people think that anything sexualized should be removed or covered up instead of investigating why the subject is initially being objectified at all.



Transitionally, Hawke masterfully connects these ideas with society today. After differentiating how some people would find discomfort in and/or sexualize something that others would describe as beautiful, Hawke employs common stereotypes in an effort to allude to the people who comprise this former group: "Thérèse does not belong to you/The horses, cars, and cowboys do." Here—depending on the interpreter—Hawke can be seen referring to a specific group of people with the terms "horses, cars, and cowboys" as these are stereotypical male interests (which is not to say women can't enjoy these things). It's as if Hawke is saying, "You can have horses, cars, and cowboys—but not the lens through which society views us, not our bodies and how they are perceived." By doing this, Hawke calls out people who objectify women and acknowledges that their behavior is rooted in misogyny that leaves them with the inability to see the beauty of mere female existence.

Lastly, the overly sexual nature of Hawke's music video was utilized to strategically emphasize the contrast between something actually sexual—the video—and something that was wrongfully sexualized—the painting. Repeatedly, Hawke claims, "It's tactless, it's a test It's just Thérèse It's just Thérèse" to argue that the purpose of the painting is to "test" people to see if they will sexualize something that shouldn't be considered sexual in the first place. In summary, Maya Hawke is an artistic genius, and certain interpretations of Therese Dreaming expose the pervasiveness of societally ingrained patriarchy. Whether we are aware of it or not, society has resisted appreciating something for its true beauty when it brings them discomfort.



CRAZY HORSE

FEMINISM OR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

BY YVONNE YUQING LIU

Is strip dancing an art? Many strip dancers are artists, from the famous Dita Von Tesse, to Lisa from Black Pink, who performed as a guest performer at the famous Crazy Horse Show in Paris this past September. Many people consider strip shows such as the Crazy Horse Show as art, especially in the current social context of celebrating women empowerment and freedom of body. Some consider strip shows to be a form of girl crush (a form of feminist action), but there is no denying its inherent sexual component. But, what kind of nudity counts as real art, rather than false, sexual exploitation in the name of art?

The Crazy Horse Show, at some point, is the ultimate combination of human aesthetics and stage lighting presenting a beautiful, modern-style

show, which is why many consider that strip shows are more art than pornography. “Martini Glass” by Dita Von Teese is a performance of tremendous female pleasure and body aesthetics, combined with jazz music and magnificent lighting and prop design, including the huge Swarovski diamond martini glass. This work is visually and audibly unparalleled. Dita, one of the most successful strippers of all



time, was also invited to co-star in Taylor Swift's "Bejeweled" music video, replicating her Martini Glass performance. As Marilyn Monroe sang, "Diamond is a woman's best friend." It may sound contradictory, but performers like Dita are genuinely making art. However, stripping in general is not considered an art, as strip dancing is tied to sexism and the patriarchal gaze. Many female strippers have no choice but to work for a living.

Cardi B was a stripper before she became a rapper, out of the need for money. Though she is grateful for the experience that helped solve her financial difficulties and has no

regrets, she has also said that she doesn't want more girls to get into the stripping business. The shame of being stared at and disrespected is crippling.

Stripping is born out of female submissiveness, sexual fantasies, and the patriarchal gaze. It is essentially the sexual exploitation of women. One of the tracks Lisa performed at the Craze Horse, "Crisis What Crisis," was set against the backdrop of Wall Street and the economic crisis. She performed it in power suits, and then stripped down to her lingerie in time to the music and the rise and fall of the stock market. The clothes used in the



performance directly represented the ups and downs of finance, even though the industry itself was for a very long time male dominated, and now even comes to objectify women as sex dolls in the hands of the wolves of Wall Street. And unlike Lisa, the other dancers didn't get to keep their lingerie on. The varying degrees of nudity also represent a notion of class discrimination. The real question is: can strip dancing be truly free when there is top-down oppression and perverted staring?



Freedom when you are naked is to not be objectified. Lisa's performance at the Crazy Horse isn't freedom because she's still an object to be gazed at. Audience members dressed in formal attire at the Crazy Horse Show playfully watch the women on stage strip down to nothing (in a space decorated with sexual innuendo), and are essentially telling the women: I'm here and I paid, NOW YOU TAKE IT OFF.



*“palette 2” by
aleen xue*

*“xingfu” by
aleen xue*



*“palette 3” by
aleen xue*





music

"jazz" by Aleen Xue



T.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Agent: 013

Subject: Taylor Alison Swift

Case #1989

INFILTRATING A MODERN- DAY CULT OF PERSONALITY:

a first hand account from an indoctrinated Swiftie

by Amber Safeer



Dear Reader,

Many moons ago, I was once oblivious to the cult following of Taylor Swift. I was an average enjoyer, bopping to her radio hits like *Shake It Off* and *Bad Blood* without a care in the world. However, this all changed when she announced her worldwide concert: The Eras Tour.

Now, the Eras Tour is more than just a set of concerts around the globe - it is an awe-inspiring, passionate piece of art filled with intense emotion. Audience members don't show up just for the songs; they attend for the 3-hour performance, the memories, and the friends made along the way. And, most importantly, they show up for Mother (a.k.a, Taylor Swift).

I was not originally planning on attending, but when my brother offered me seats in the lower bowl of MetLife Stadium, I could not refuse. Besides, it could be fun, right?

Part 1: The Preparation

Unlike other concerts, the months leading up to the Eras Tour are full of sheer dedication, willpower, and work. Swifties go hard. The friend I attended the concert with prepped 4 months in advance just to create over 200 friendship bracelets to trade and give out to other concert-goers. Personally, I only committed the week before to create my bracelets, but nevertheless it was time consuming. In addition to the friendship bracelets, there is also a key step in the planning process that nobody really talks about: memorization. Listen, I am a Swiftie at heart, but there was no way I had all 200+ songs by Taylor Swift engraved into my brain. So, I dedicated months of my life listening to the "Eras Tour Playlist" on Spotify on repeat until I could recall the lyrics so fluidly, as if it were my own name. Any downtime I had - on a bus, walking to class, doing homework - was all spent listening to Taylor. Even by looking at the search trends for "Taylor Swift" on Google, it is evident that with the announcement of the Eras Tour way back in November 2022, her name has been a growing topic. This only further serves to prove just how dedicated the fans are, surrounding themselves with Taylor's music and history. These followers worship Taylor, feeling the need to know every minute detail about her entire life. Aside from the parasocial relationship this leads to for some fans, there is still one more imperative aspect to truly becoming indoctrinated into this cult: the outfits.





From cosplaying as a refrigerator light to replicating the bejeweled bodysuit that Taylor wears in her music video, the Swifties pour their blood, sweat, and tears into their outfits. To preface, my brother became a Swiftie long before I did, so he picked out our duos costume for us: the moon and Saturn, in reference to his favorite song, Seven.

He, of course, wanted to cosplay as the moon, because at our particular concert date, Phoebe Bridgers was set to perform Moon Song as well. I unquestioningly went along with this, not wanting to disappoint my brother, the fans, and, heaven forbid, Taylor herself. It was just another stage into the process of Swiftie-hood (though admittedly, dressing up in a crowd of over 80,000 is super fun).

Part 2: The Performance

As aforementioned, Phoebe Bridgers was our opener at East Rutherford MetLife Night 3, along with Taylor's previous backup dancer, OWENN. This is when I realized just how expansive Taylor's fanbase is, indoctrinating fans of Phoebe Bridgers (along with the rest of Boy Genius), Sabrina Carpenter, Paramore, Beabadoobee, Girl In Red, and so much more. Even Ice Spice appeared at the end of the concert to sing Karma with Taylor, raising commotion from the crowd by ten-fold.

This relation between Taylor and the artists goes back to the idea of this almost parasocial relationship that the super fans experience idolizing Taylor. Specifically, there was a moment in the concert I attended where Taylor and Phoebe had a heart to heart on stage, which both humanized them and made us, the crowd, feel more connected to them. This only further solidifies the audience's love for Taylor because of her generosity, perpetuating this idea of a cult. The most baffling part about all of this is that it works - I nearly cried at the concert because of how pure the moment was. That's not to say that I think Taylor is faking it or that she's not actually nearly as sweet in her private life, but I find it interesting how we, as an audience, are made to feel that these moments are reserved for only us. We think that these little instances don't occur at the other shows, making us feel special and elevated among the rest.



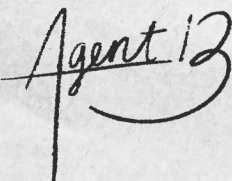
This comes into play in a number of ways. Firstly, the celebrity sightings; while I was at the concert, I had the pleasure of seeing Gordon Ramsey, Ben Platt, Paul Rudd, and Andrea Swift among the crowd. Not only is it engaging to see what celebrities take an interest in Taylor's music, but it enforces the idea of a unique show because not everybody will encounter these figures during their concerts. Moreover, Taylor's performance itself serves as a means of creating a connection with the audience. Through her personalized intros, heartfelt monologues, and cheeky comments, Taylor truly makes it feel as though this concert and these instances are exclusively for us. We earned it - we spent all that time making the costumes, the friendship bracelets, the connections - to the point where she calls our crowd "special." This is further emphasized by one of the most exciting moments in the night: the surprise songs.

Now, if you're unfamiliar with the surprise song segment of the show, the rules are as follows: Taylor gets to pick 2 songs to perform each night acoustically that aren't already present on her setlist. The goal was to never repeat a song twice (emphasizing uniqueness), with the exception of the *Midnights* album or if she made a mistake singing the songs before. So, in honor of this, Taylor gifted us *Welcome to New York* and *Clean*. This was an especially interesting choice, as *Clean* had already been played before. This begged the question for my concert group: did we get lucky? From my one friend's perspective, she was overwhelmed with joy because *Clean* is her favorite song by Taylor. However, to my brother, we simply ended up with a song that had already been played before, so it felt less exclusive to him. Personally, I think it feels special to have a repeat song because we get to hear it the "correct" way, so to speak.

All of this to say, Taylor and her team go all out to seemingly individualize the concerts for her fans. The originality and exclusivity only promotes more content on social media platforms, spreading Taylor's influence far and wide.

Part 3: Conclusions

All jokes aside from the cultish behavior of fans or Taylor's leading aura, I have to admit that the Eras Tour amazed me. While Taylor's stage presence excited the roaring crowd, the dancers, backing vocals, and the band all killed it to make a truly breathtaking experience. With over 3 hours of content and 44 songs from her entire career, it is no wonder how this masterpiece took the world by storm. The constantly changing intricate costumes, the lighting, on-stage effects and the camera crew, props, and the colorful confetti only added to the exhilarating ambience of it all. Hands down, the Eras Tour, without exaggeration, is one of the best performances I have ever had the pleasure of being a part of. If you somehow haven't yet, take a chance on Taylor Swift and her music. Soon you'll know the lyrics to every song *all too well*.

Sincerely, 



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artworks by



A photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a white off-the-shoulder top and a necklace, sitting in a lush green forest. She is looking down at something in her hands. The image has a torn paper effect at the top and bottom edges, with fragments of text visible. The title 'the magic and introspection of UMI' is overlaid in large white letters.

the magic and introspection of UMI

BY SOPHIE D'ERRICO

Tierra Umi Wilson, known as UMI, is a deeply thoughtful, meditative artist in the indie music scene. The Seattle-born, Afro Japanese artist bridges both of her identities in her music and prioritizes representing her intersectionality. Inspired by artists such as SZA, Frank Ocean, and Jhené Aiko, she creates each piece of music with meaningful lyrics, beautiful vocals, and soothing instrumentals.

Her debut album "Forest in the City" came out in 2022. A captivating and thoroughly artistic 15 song tracklist spans a myriad of topics including insecurity,

ongoing, passion, and regret. The album begins with a 34 second song "hello hi" made up of nature sounds and soft multilingual incoherent conversation. This is followed by the song "sorry" that includes lyrics that feel as though they come from a page ripped out of UMI's journal, as she reflects on her own tendencies and desires, apologizes to herself, and vows by her resolutions. She circles through these various thoughts and emotions with lyrics such as "I wanna be happy with my own path/I wanna be good to the friends that I have" and "I'm sorry for talking down too much/Sorry, I never trust my gut."

In “synergy” UMI takes us through the feelings of realizing you have found love. She sings, “‘Cause reality ain’t nothin’ but choices/So why not rejoice, and/Be happy ‘cause you could be my choice?” The album is a beautiful and peaceful-sounding R&B, neo-soul fusion as UMI soars through different melodies and guides the listener through her reflective journey. It also creates the perfect environment for your own introspections, particularly in the calmness of “lost and found.”

UMI’s lyrics are full of thoughts, questions, and observations of

herself. This is a result of the artist’s lifestyle which prioritizes reflection, introspection, meditation, and journaling. In fact, the name Umi means “ocean” in Japanese, which the artist explained is a representation of the natural “flow” of her music and artistry.

UMI tweeted/X a picture of her journal where she provided instructions for how one should listen to “Forest in the City”; she encouraged fans to tidy up their space, create an ambience, meditate, and journal before the album to encourage their own introspection.

Creating a space for listeners to have a productive experience and make their own introspections is part of what makes UMI so special. In a 2020 interview with Genius, the artist said, “I would say my intention with my music is always to heal, to help elevate people’s spirits, or to help inspire introspection, self-love, or contemplation.”





I've been a fan of UMI since the release of her 2019 song "Love Affair." I later fell in love with her "Introspection Reimagined" EP for its jazz influences until I became fully enamored by her "Forest in the City" album, which is full of music reminiscent of one of my favorite songs, "Good Days" by SZA. Without even knowing that UMI's desire was to establish human connection and offer introspection for listeners, I found myself playing the album when I wanted to sit back and focus on my thoughts. Her music made me so at peace that I would also listen to it as I fell asleep for a midday nap.

While each album and EP retain their own individuality, what remains consistent is UMI's quality of music—something that will keep fans like myself looking forward to whatever she brings next.

GATEKEEPING: HOW THE ROCK SCENE IS CHANGING

by Sage Short

With the popularity of TikTok, artists have found a way to get discovered. Underground artists are gaining a platform, lesser-known artists are emerging, and old artists are coming back. TikTok has exposed many to styles they may not have previously known and draws them to concerts they may have never expected to enjoy. Rock and its subgenres have been gaining popularity on TikTok, and not everyone is happy with it. Some may gatekeep for no reason, some gatekeep their niche bands becoming popular, and others gatekeep in fear of their bands changing sound with popularity, or to keep the concert culture from changing further. Following the spike in nu-metal, as predicted, tickets are harder to secure for some fans and those who do attend, notice a shift in the overall concert experience.

For example, when I saw Pierce the Veil opening for I Prevail, the conversations I'd seen happening on Twitter, Reddit, and TikTok made themselves




Photo by @PullTheTriggerBrittPhotography

visible to me. During “Match into Water” by Pierce the Veil, the quiet crowd erupted, and everyone removed their phones to get a video of the lead singer Vic Fuentes screaming, “She’s mine,” an audio that had gone viral on TikTok with the resurfacing of the 2012 song. After that, the venue emptied by more than half before the openers had even been introduced, and Pierce the Veil hadn’t finished performing yet. This trend continues at other shows and other tours. During a 2023 North American Tour, Pierce the Veil double-headlined The Used. After the first few shows, Pierce the Veil was noted to have switched places with The Used and instead of performing first, they opted to close it. Rumors circulated through fans, saying Pierce the Veil noticed the crowd dissipating after their set, so opted to close the show to keep fans in at the venue.

Following its resurgence, the phrase “TikTok song” has been stamped to “Match into Water” as it had for many rock and emo songs, both new and old. Some bands, like Bad Omens, have begun to relish in this term, alerting fans to their awareness that this category has been placed on them. The lead singer, Noah Sebastian welcomed newcomers who have recently discovered Bad Omens, the rock scene, and its sub genres, but joked that it’s clear some newcomers have no idea what they’re doing. Learning how to conduct yourself at a concert takes practice, but it’s designed for the safety of others.

Gatekeeping up-and-coming artists never really works because new fans will continue to come even if they are met with animosity. Instead of rejecting newcomers, welcome them to learn about the culture to make the overall experience better for everyone. When I went to my first rock show, I didn’t know what I was doing, but I was willing to learn and was welcomed into the community. However, sometimes, picking where you like to stand in a show can take some trial and error. Not every spot at a general admission show is the same and picking where you place yourself is very important for your safety and the safety of others. Noah Sebastian, at one show, said: “You can still crowd surf, rock it, rock the f*** out, go to the mosh pit, and go nuts. It’s a party here but we take care of each other. Alright? That’s the only rule. If you don’t want to be a part of the crowd surfers or the chaos or the nonsense, go to the sides or the back and be out of the way because you can’t have both [front row/center pit and no chaos].”





CONCERT ETIQUETTE



BY AKANSHA
SINGH

Concerts, a physical site where you can listen to your favorite artists live; a chance to experience their music in person. Being immersed in crowds of dedicated fans who like the same artists as you transforms concerts into a bonding experience. Though, imagine a concert where you're not pushed around in the pit, people are not fainting, someone isn't screaming into your ear, and you're not on the verge of passing out— isn't that a dream.

Do concerts need to have etiquette? Every place in the world has rules, and traditions, and customs, so can't concerts be the place where you can just let go? Yes and no.

Yes, because concerts feel cathartic, and they sometimes are once-in-a-lifetime experiences, so you should be allowed to release all your emotions and revere the music.

No, because everyone wants to have fun, and everyone is there for the same reason- to experience the magic of music being played live. Therefore, everyone should have the chance to have fun, not be pushed around, and not be subject to a subpar experience.

I have been to five different concerts this year, all different kinds of music, and all in different venues, holding anywhere from 400 to 80,000 people. After every single

concert, I went home with an experience that left me wondering why people can't just be civil, or well-mannered, or at least considerate.

I went to Ezoo this past September, an EDM festival held in New York. There were more than 80,000 people at this venue, and understandably, there would be crowds of people pushed together and long lines. Though, in these long lines, not even near the stage, I witnessed people passing out, throwing up, and aggressively shoving others out of the way. Though the mishandling at this concert was in part due to the organizers of the event, the pushing around or spilling drinks on others was at the hands of the people in attendance.

Cigarettes After Sex is one of my favorite bands and I have already seen them in past years. Their most recent concert at the Forest Hills Stadium in September was their biggest venue yet. Standing in the pit, my friends and I smelled strange odors and heard chatter from another side. It was a girl who had thrown up, that sucks, but she was refusing to leave and was very inconsolable. She was falling on others, fumbling her words, and was still on the verge of throwing up, while her friends just stood there. It was only

after the crowd started to speak up that she and her friends left.

Shortly after that, we had already been waiting in the pit for an hour. Then, out of nowhere, a woman pushed everyone out of the way. She claimed that she cared more for the band, and that made her deserving of a place in the front. She shoved others, taking their spots, and acted as though she was entitled to that spot.

These experiences are not crazy, but they are not stand-alone experiences either. I have had friends who have gone to other concerts and complained about one thing or another.

In no shape or form are my experiences stopping me from going to more concerts. In fact, I have some coming up later in the month. My point here is that I just wish people would be more attentive.

Concert etiquette is not some crazy set of rules that I think people should follow. I just ask that people just realize that they are not the only ones dying to listen to someone's music. Also, I ask that people be considerate of others. Everyone gets to listen to the music, everyone gets a turn, and everyone can have fun- you just have to be mindful- that is all.



melodrama.

"inbound" by Kyle Handojo



WELL, AREN'T YOU THE GREATEST THING TO EVER EXIST?

by Kayla Gonzales



The impact of envy is heavily prevalent in "Lacy" by Olivia Rodrigo and "Heather" by Conan Gray. When an emotional songwriter utilizes a name in the title, there are two things to know. One, it will be the most heartbreaking song with lyrics that seem to be taken straight from your diary page. And two, it's most likely written through a lens of desire, jealousy, or somberness.

With "Heather" releasing in 2020 and "Lacy" releasing in 2023, fans are seeing parallels between the stylistic choice of words and painful admiration of being the unattainable girl.

Merriam-Webster defines envy as "a painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage." Lacy and Heather represent the projection of a person you compare yourself to in every situation, no matter how hard you try to accept yourself.

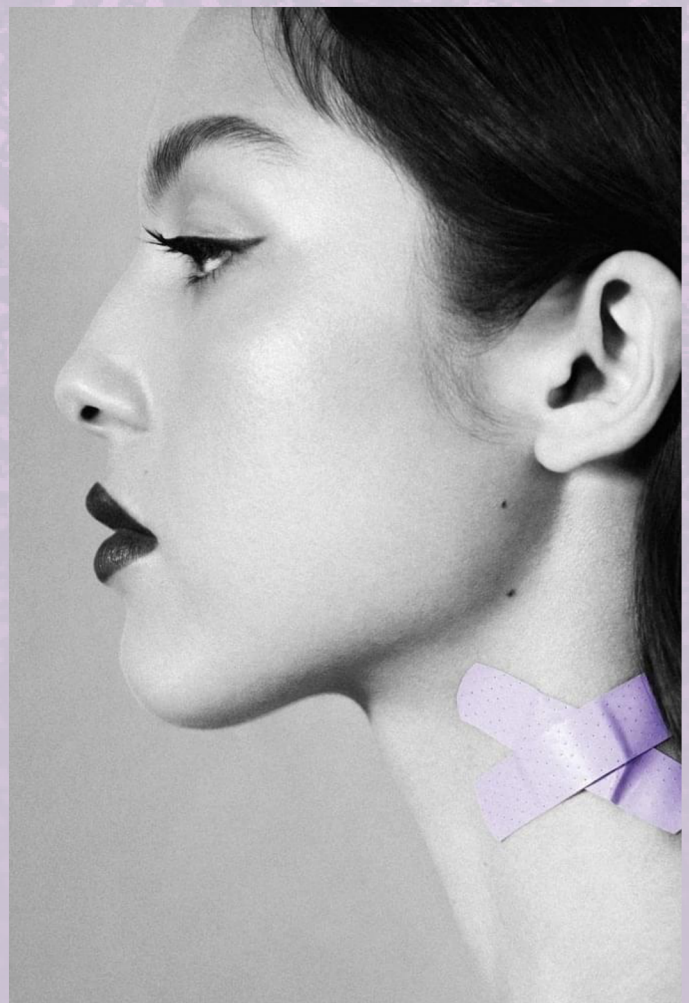
Diving into "Lacy," Olivia utilizes the phrase "skin like puff pastry" to represent how her idea of Lacy is someone who is white or fair-skinned. As Olivia is Filipino-American, it appears that she's chasing a beauty standard just out



of reach. She begins to see Lacy in everything and everywhere, unable to go about her day without the comparisons consuming her. A toxic obsession with an "angel" rises through each line, even likening this figure to Brigitte Bardot, a beautiful French film actress. The words, "Well, aren't you the greatest thing to ever exist" teems with sarcasm and jealousy as Olivia realizes everyone adores this person that she will never be. She takes it a step further, pointing out, "I care, like ribbons in your hair, my stomach's all in knots, you've got the one thing that I want."

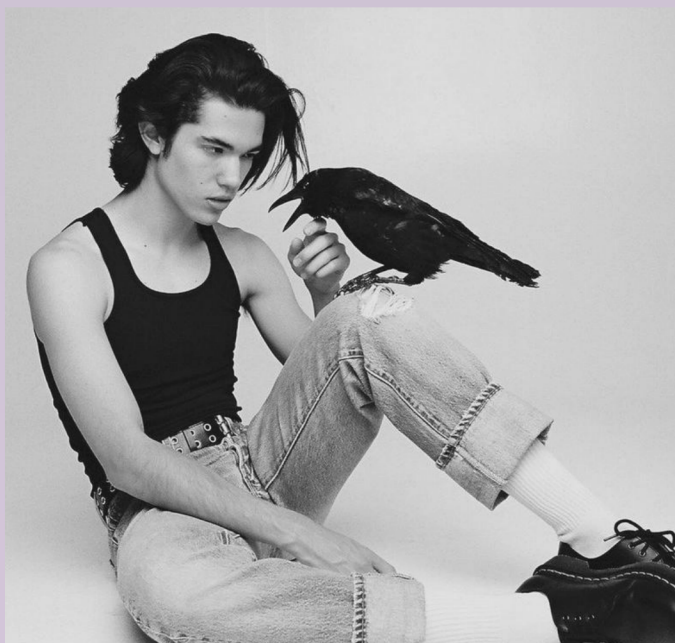
Upon this pedestal, Lacy is claimed to have such pretty and flawless hair that the ribbons decorate it like a present. Lacy is this gift to society and she is the epitome of beauty, separating her from the norm.

In a failed attempt to bring Lacy down from the heavens and back onto Earth, Olivia tries to remind herself that Lacy is merely a human just like the rest of us, but "it's like you're made of angel dust" highlights that she is still untouchable. Angel dust is also another word for the illegal drug, PCP, which causes hallucinations. This likeness reveals that this



obsession with picking apart Lacy's life has turned into an addiction. Olivia closes off the song with the lyrics, "I despise my jealous eyes and how hard they fell for you. Yeah, I despise my rotten mind and how much it worships you." She toes the line between 'Am I in love with you' or 'Do I want to be you.' In a way, it's a mixture of both, but it's evident that her relationship with Lacy is unhealthy and poisons her perspective.

"Heather" takes on a slightly different twist as Conan compares himself to the person his crush is in love with. It underlines the act of being "just friends", but clearly wanting more from a one-sided viewpoint. Conan's hyperbole of "She's got you mesmerized while I die" emphasizes how much it physically hurts him to watch the person he loves fall in love with someone else. The line, "Why would you ever





kiss me” is a rhetorical question because he knows that as long as Heather is around, he will never stand a chance against her beauty.

The iconic line, “You gave her your sweater, it’s just polyester, but you like her better” goes deeper than just handing a random hoodie to someone. To many, a sweater is like a security blanket that hangs on your body to cover up all your flaws. Willingly giving away this shield demonstrates the shedding of these insecurities and choosing to turn over a new leaf. It’s this person’s way of showing that they’re giving their all to Heather, and permanently closing the door on any possibilities between them and Conan. This is also represented in the stanza after, through the phrase, “Now I’m getting colder.” He lost the love, warmth, and affection that he would have gotten if he was the one receiving the sweater.

Each line is filled with spite and admiration as Conan sings, “But how could I hate her? She’s such an angel, but then again kinda wish she were dead.” The envy penetrates straight through to the listener. Heather is clearly a nice and perfect girl in everyone’s eyes, but Conan believes his only chance at love is if

she is no longer present on this Earth. It’s been three years since this dramatized song was written, but December 3rd will remain a national holiday for all the sad girlies out there.

These two songs ignited a wave of trends that graced the internet. Thousands of people across the globe shared the same gut-wrenching emotions as they compared themselves to the fictitious girl. Individuals shared their personal experiences with having a Lacy and Heather. Everyone expressed their vulnerability to strangers, only to find common ground through similar encounters and circumstances. Ribbons have also been rising in popularity over the past few years as more and more celebrity “it” girls wear them. Just as Olivia depicts, having a ribbon in your hair makes it feel like everything is coming together. For Olivia, it’s the cherry on top for pushing her obsession over the edge. For Conan, it’s the optimism of Heather that kills him.

It’s difficult to overcome the envy of wanting to be someone you will never be. As long as the Lacys and Heathers of the world exist, it will forever be “the sweetest torture one could bear.”



Hysterical Women Laugh to the End

THE "MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL" REVIEW



This past summer, the legend of Mrs. Maisel, " or Midge," concluded as soulmates Susie Myerson and Midge continued their journey to success. But it would be too perfunctory to label their story as a simple "success story". Their awakenings, struggles, perseverance, friendships, and even their flaws, contributed to their exciting journey. Over the course, it took five seasons for Midge to go from unknown to titular "the Marvelous Mrs. Maisel". But this show is not just about Midge. It's about the hysteria of millions of women. The hysteria we have been waiting for a long time.

HYSTERIA

The word "hysteria" comes from ancient Greece and was thought to be a mental condition caused by the presence of the womb. It was only in the eighteenth century that hysteria was proven to be an illness that originated in the brain rather than the womb. However, the psychological discovery does not detract from the very fact that hysteria emasculates, represses, and stigmatizes women's emotions. People describe Midge as hysterical, including Susie, but what can be seen to have changed is that they have taken this trait as a compliment to professional comedians.

Identifying as a feminist-centric show, "Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" broke away from the harmful gender roles that are so ingrained in our society. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the best way to cure female hysteria was marriage and pregnancy.

Midge and her mother, Rose, hoped to get married and have at least two children by 26. Mei, the daughter of the owner of the Chinatown gambling parlor, went to medical school and later became Joel's girlfriend, changing the centuries-old tradition. She discovered she was pregnant and told Joel, but refused to marry him and "lost" the baby. Mei then travels to Chicago to become the woman she always dreamed of being. At the time, abortion was considered taboo and illegal, however, sixty years later, Mei's reluctance to succumb to patriarchy is applauded. Mei rejected the treatment of female hysteria just like Midge put all her unfulfilled affairs at the bottom of her priorities list. They are always hysterical, and always seeking solitude and splendor.

Midge is melodramatic in every way. From making fun of her marriage to her ex-husband Joel on stage, her parents' sex life, and telling dirty jokes in strip clubs, she has always been dramatic. However, her charismatic histrionics continue off-stage. The show devotes a lot of time to the hilarious routines of Midge and Susie, with Midge always running amok, acting like a total extrovert, and not caring when people say, "That woman is crazy".



Midge forms relationships with a number of male characters, but each one has an unexpected ending. When we thought she and Dr. Benjamin would get married, she broke up and went on a tour with Shy Baldwin. And when we thought she and Lenny Bruce would be a couple, they simply indulged in a dramatic one-night stand. We thought she was going to have a new relationship with Gordon (her boss). She rejected Gordon right away. And when we thought that she and Joel would just spend time together as a family (Joel was the true love of Midge's life), he never remarried her. People questioned her choices and thought she was crazy, but she made her life into a tremendous comedy

REDEFINING FEMININITY

In Season 4, in the strip club where Midge performed as a comedian, there was a scene where the strippers performed the finale along with the song "Femininity". It is one of the most powerful images from the entire show. We've been trying to find a definition of feminism, and this show gives us a good answer– the power to keep trying to break out of the rut of being stigmatized and marginalized.



The strip club manager in the show, who mansplains and behaves rudely towards the performer he works with, begins to learn to respect them after Midge's arrival. He learns not to barge into the dressing rooms. He learns to manage the set lists, and puts flowers and good coffee backstage. The manager as a male never cared about these details because they didn't fit his masculine image. And Midge, as a figure of femininity, changed this environment with her usual assertive and adamant approach.

Midge worked as a writer on Gordon's show in Season 5, and was the only female writer. Going from feeling out of place to getting better, she finally gets paid the same as the male writers. What seems fair and normal gets an indictment from producer Mike. Women tended to work as secretaries, housekeepers or make-up counter girls– jobs that don't seem to touch men's core interests. While doctors, producers, and college professors were all men. Women's talents were always buried under men's, and credit is given to their husbands or fathers. With a little luck, they could become bourgeois, soaked in the glamorous bubbles of designer brands and gardening clubs, or, with a little less luck, be stuck in the kitchen and doing side jobs. But none of them can escape the patriarchal gaze and marginalization.





Midge herself has suffered from this. She has been neglected by her father since she was a child and has been taught by her mother how to be a lady. After her marriage to Joel goes sour, her parents kept telling her to win Joel back or find a new marriage because they don't think she can or should survive without a husband. After she buys back her old apartment with her own salary and a loan from her ex-father-in-law, her parents lie to the public saying that they bought the house for her in order to make her "look more feminine". This is a structural injustice in a patriarchal society. Women's merits are often ignored or credited to men. But Midge is marvelous because she has sought to break out of this rut and pursue excellence.

In contrast to Midge's representation of the average woman, Susie finally unravels the mystery of her sexuality, her past love affairs, and her success of becoming THE manager of the show business in the last season. Her identity enables her to step out of the ordinary female confinement. Her gender identity allows her to neutralize her gender attributes. Because she doesn't expect male favor, she doesn't seek male approval. She doesn't care about the measurement of her thighs or the size of her breasts like Midge, and she essentially lives more freely. It's been said that great people are androgynous. Susie's charm is that she never seems to hesitate or dwell. She is firm, bold, and brave. She was very sure of her feelings, her instincts, and her goals. Susie accepted that she came from poverty, and never stopped living and striving for excellence. In some ways, she and Midge were symbiotic and similar, and that made them soul mates.

DON'T

Season 5 wrapped up with a fast pace. Simplifying the structure and comedic scenes from before, the writers put their focus on what ultimately remains of Mrs. Maisel's female destiny. We've seen a lot of it before- the female workplace, the female domestic space, the paradoxical postures of the father's ego and the mother's softness in the parental relationship. Episode seven and eight went to a new depth. These two episodes explore Midge's son, and thus, speaks about something more heart-stopping and painful.

Episode 7 tells the story of Midge's older son, Ethan, who was placed in the "happy group" on the school's "gifted and talented" scale, meaning that he didn't excel in math, literature, science, or art. But he was "the happiest kid alive." Midge's father, Abe, was shocked: "He's the first son of the current generation of the Weissman family, and the Weissmans have been gifted for generations." While he and his son Noah are both academically brilliant, Midge is all about being comical and talking about a cute pink toilet. He even has a genealogy documenting the meritorious accomplishments of generations of the eldest sons of the Weissmans. They're all geniuses, and as such, a gifted Weisman boy can't be "happy." It's not until he realizes that the next genius in the family is actually Midge's daughter Ester, that Abe experiences a moment of shock and pain.

Why is he in pain? Episode 8 featured a scene of "a father's emptiness and repentance". When Abe walks into his usual gentlemen's dinner gathering, he is not eloquent as usual, but rather bitter when he says that everything is nothing. He has given all his teaching to his eldest son and has completely neglected his daughter. She went through a bitter divorce but stood up on her own and revitalized. Perhaps, she was always that strong; she was an inherently exceptional woman, it was just the structural neglect of him and society that had been putting the shackles on her. He realized that behind generations of the genius Weissman men are generations of neglected daughters.

When Midge is experiencing being scrubbed from another show, the producer says to her, "I look at you, and all I can see is your pretty face and your clothes, and I can't get your humor. I don't know why a pretty woman needs humor." She suddenly realized that she had relented without fighting back. She had Susie contact her ex-girlfriend, "Mrs. Gordon Ford", to get her on the Gordon Show no matter what. This seemingly sudden outburst of obsessive, irrational, almost aggressive insanity, wasn't towards Susie. Her outbursts derived from familial and generational oppression that suppressed her energy that had been waiting to erupt for a long time.

When she returns to Bryn Mawr as an alumna, she finds a letter that she wrote to herself ten years ago. It has only one word on it- the bolded and underlined "DON'T". She can't remember what it meant. Mrs. Gordon reminded her and a series of encounters woke her up. Don't flinch. Don't hesitate. Don't let your male counterparts steal your credit. Do not be merciful. Do not be humble. Don't say no to yourself.

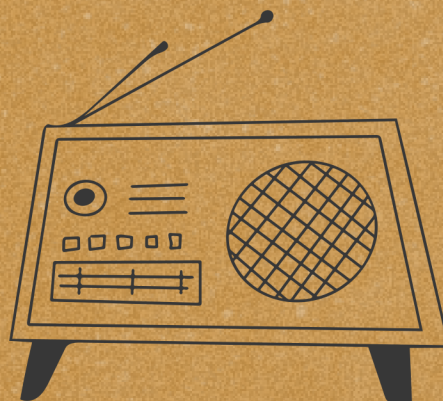


LAUGHED TO THE END

Midge and Susie are finally in their twilight years after many ups and downs, happy and sad times. Although they are not in the same city or even in the same time zone, they still get together over the phone to watch TV programs, talk about life, work as before, and tell jokes that make them both laugh until the end. Just like Lenny Bruce many years ago enlightened Midge, "I'm living in a big house. But all alone", she and Susie are both living alone in their own huge mansion after their success. But they still leave a space for each other, a space that fills their souls with laughter. As characters in a comedy, their vibrantness and laughter are what make it a comedy.

Perhaps this is the kind of feminism we are looking for. Excellence, vividness, hysteria, and unbridled laughter.

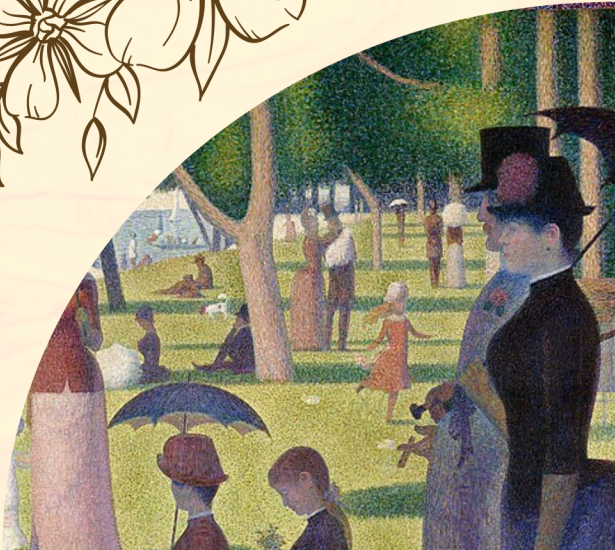
Hahaha
hahaha
hahaha
hahaha



by Sahana Iyer

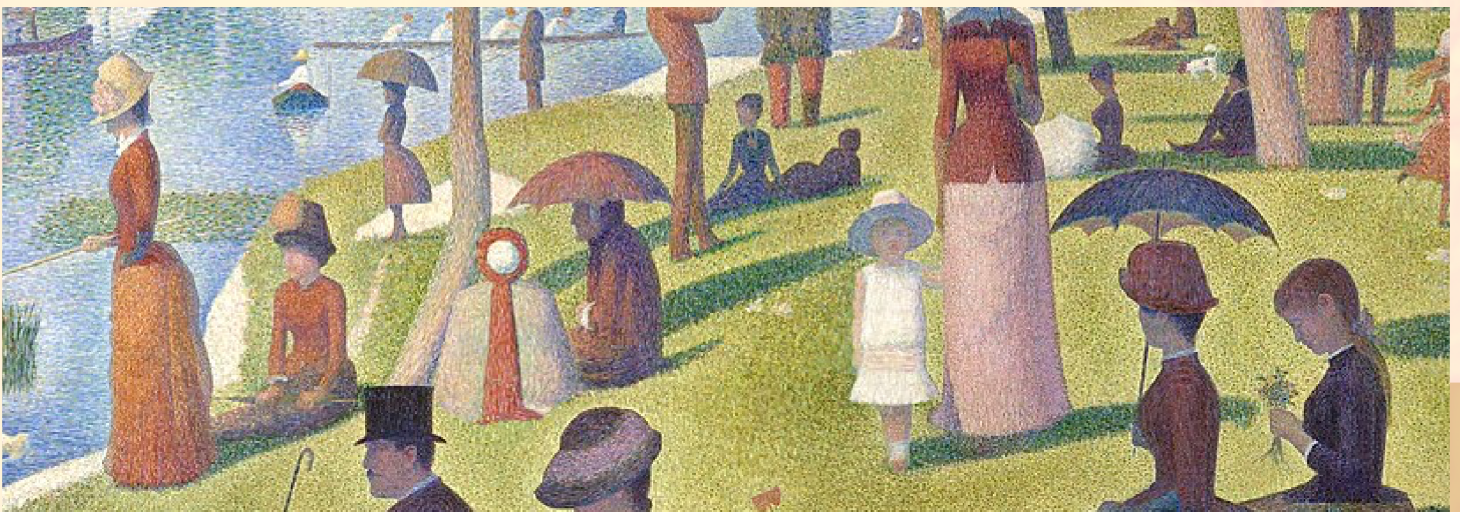
A Sunday On La Grande Jatte

a stream of consciousness inspired by the painting



A cool, gentle breeze caressed her face in a manner so soothing and refreshing. It seemed to have invigorated her very being as she picked up her pace, galloping barefoot on the grass. "I am flying. Je suis une oiseau". Preferably an eagle, she thought. The mid-afternoon sun glistened on every surface it could catch and she chased its light. She giggled at the tickling straws of green. "I feel warm. C'est le bonheur". Ever so often, she would pause to examine a lonely flower, admiring its unique beauty.

Flowers are the most extraordinary creations. No wonder bees are fond of flowers. "I am quite fond of bees. I wish maman packed honey and toast for lunch". She finally skidded to a stop and heaved the dense air. "Oh mon dieu"! The restrictive nature of the air made her long for ice cream. She could taste the snowy texture as it melted with an instant touch from the tip of her tongue. She closed her eyes and pictured herself at an ice cream parlor. Ah, the smell of sugary treats. A sharp command thrust her into the present. Her maman's voice disrupted the languorous equilibrium of summer. Why must parents be intrusive? The unappealing look of seriousness always tarnishing their faces. Why do adults shun the children within themselves?



Pourquoi? Maman rapidly directed and ordered, like a platoon commander. The words that structured themselves into rigid phrases and burdensome sentences were incomprehensible to her. She could hear nothing but the exasperation and condescension. "Maman always welcomes me with her dulcet tones. It is hot. I need water". Water. The Seine glistened and sparkled; it possessed a certain magical quality. It flowed effortlessly, carrying its occupants from one side to the other, shore to shore, up and down, left and right. Oh! How many places can we go? What laid beyond the blue hue? "I cannot see past my reflection, but I am sure there is more". Hidden secrets. Water nymphs. A Portal to the Underworld. She escaped her maman's restraint and stood at the edge where the land met water; there were miniature fishes in red and orange and a heron attempting a kill. The poor fishes. Out in the open for slaughter. I hope the heron doesn't succeed. Swim fishies! Live your life! And she turned around and took off running again. Her hair flying behind her, her orange skirt flapping around her legs, the perpetuating euphoria. For what better way is there to spend an afternoon on La Grande Jatte.





DROP YOUR

FRIENDS

by Ananya Mehta

The great discipline of psychology loves analyzing intrusive thoughts. Freud's Id, Jung's universal personality archetypes, Adler's organ inferiority complex (the overcompensation of weaknesses by developing abilities)- you name it. In fact, Psychoanalyst Karen Horney even documented the sweet, sweet nausea that swamped her mommy-issue-ridden heart when she crossed paths with her older brother. Psychology has everything covered! From accusing abused women of maintaining the steady halitosis of a schizophrenic coke addict. Labeling a dying woman's mulish reluctance to retire as fourth-wave feminism. And justifying the annihilation of entire family trees in the name of godly inheritance for the over tanned one-removed Europeans.

But who cares about that? I don't. Psychology has always been for those who had lunch with their socially liberal, fiscally conservative art teachers. In reality, intuition is the unadulterated backbone of society. Intuition is the antithesis of the intrusive thoughts that psychology loves so much. Intuition is the urge to explode into nitrogenous waste whenever your physical and mental worlds collide, thus disrupting your innate knowledge.

So, this sixth sense is activated when your only buddies are absent with the flu. Undoubtedly, their moms took them to Six Flags because they are closer Best Friends Forever than you will ever be. Or, the time your friends arrest you in the AirBnB without food or water only to come back with one carton of bottled water to use to cook pasta, and bind Ragu's marinara sauce and Tostito's queso blanco dip to make "pink sauce."

[This gets me to my main argument: Drop your friends. You do not need them.](#)

So what if your childhood casts a looming tumor over your social and mental competence because your imaginary friends and classmates refused to make eye contact with you? At least you got to reenact the High School Musical trilogy every day during recess. Who cares if the other fifth graders did not want to play tag with you? The first graders accepted you with loving arms, and it was not weird at all. You long forgot that YOU were the kid who was accused of eating boogers!



DROP YOUR FRIENDS, OR ELSE YOU WILL END UP LIKE THEM

Don't get me started on loyalty- and I am not talking about Taylor Swift and her victimhood. What is loyalty?- if not unconditional trust and honesty. I can blindly fall back on my friends, and they will be there. A friend owning up to their flakey tendencies without tepid excuses (we have our locations shared, genius. Also, why would you attend a prayer circle over a pool party?).

Most importantly, your friend is not friends with your opps, who have tirelessly tried to sabotage you and spat in your water in the sixth grade. Having said that, loyalty is persistently compromised. Especially when your friends of ten years sees you as the entertaining scapegoat with a heart of aluminum at best.

Of course, forgiveness is paramount in all relationships. The absence of pardoning stagnates people; after all, how will relationships grow? Those who discharge everybody and everything of its flaws are seen as chill. The nonchalant attitude is idealized because of its relaxed resilience. Easy-going relationships are successful and, conversely, lackluster. Sure, having somebody to walk to Friends Cafe NB and share a Persian tea with is fun. And having another friend who you can talk about humanities with is also enticing. But what if you once considered the same friends family?

For the love of God, drop your friends, or you will end up like me! Gullible and jobless. All I have now is an overflowing stack of ancient Birthday cards in lieu of what could have been "friends."

Traditionally, friendship is an organic companionship, completed by various variables, including mutual faith, communication, and esteemed consideration for each other. These organic relationships can be formed by proximity, association, and sheer chemistry. The platonic relationship is glorified because of its guaranteed loyalty that one may not receive from other connections. Friendships can seamlessly upgrade to familial relations.

I say that is BS. Granted, friends are more accessible because, unlike romantic partners, a friend is not seeking somebody who is at least a seven on ten. But that does not mean friends are ugly-blind. If anything, friendship is pansexual. All those times your friends didn't include you in their Instagram posts reflects how little they respect your marginalized phenotype. Or! When your friends prefer you with glasses rather than contacts. Such camaraderie is a status symbol where partners are used as pons to display materialistic and intellectual richness. So when the same friend walks to Dunkin Donuts with you for the fifteenth time that month, just know that you are the side chick nobody cares about.





DOING IT FOR THE PLOT



By Saadhika Mamidi

Not that I want to cause drama, but I do it for the plot. Why can't a girl have a good night out?

This what ChatGPT told me when I asked if she knows what doing it for the plot means: "It's worth noting that 'doing it for the plot' is often used with a sense of humor and self-awareness, acknowledging that the inclusion of explicit content can sometimes be gratuitous or driven by other motivations, such as attracting a certain audience."

Let's take it from there. Not everything needs to be sexual – we don't need to be making out, or having sex, but why can't we just lie...for fun?

A frat brother you'll never see again? Lie! A man catcalls you? Lie! You walk past someone you have never seen? Lie! You meet someone at Butlers? Lie! Someone asks for your snap? Lie! You meet someone at Daniel's? Lie! There's always a good reason to lie. Who's going to remember?

Now, I don't condone lying on the daily, but when you're belligerent and just want to have some fun... who's stopping you? Oh, so you dropped out of college? Or you're backpacking across Europe? I can't believe that you changed your name to Princess! You're a tattoo artist? A professional ping pong player? You were in the Barbie movie?!?!?!?

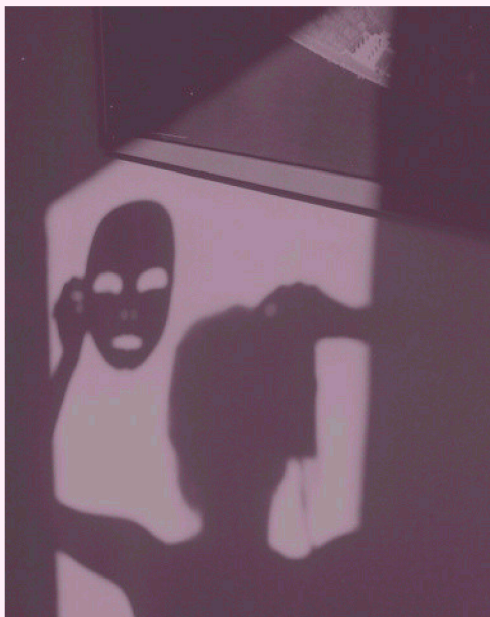
BE CRAZY

However, I would like to clarify something.

This is just for the girls.

From experience, I would like to say that there's a difference between men and women. A difference between men lying and women lying. Men lie with reason – to harm, to hide something, but women, women do it for shits and giggles. We don't have an incentive to lie, we do it for the sake of the night. A little white lie is told for men who want something from women, and you don't want to give back, then lie.

Doing it for the plot: a story to talk about during the debrief in the morning.





potpourri*

"lone at midnight" by Lexi Tassone

Femininity for a

BY RYANN IANNOTTI

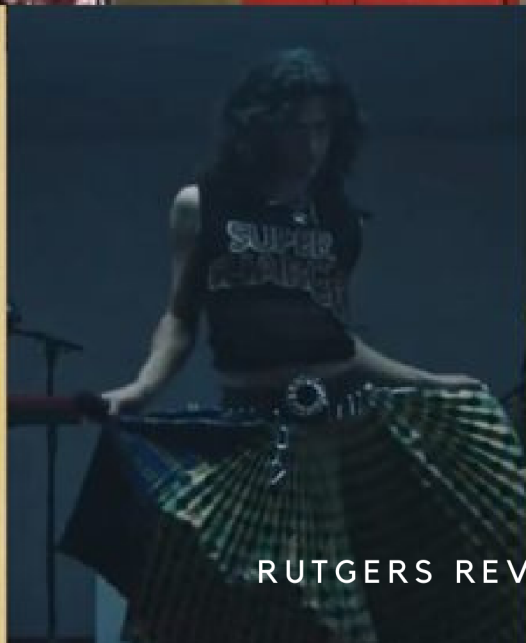
An affirming self-concept is impossible for a woman with the desire to both dress comfortably and express their gender as feminine. A woman's femininity—to be seen as so, that is, feminine—must be so extremely saturated in delicacy and charm. Yet men can wear something as trivial as a necklace or rings to be perceived as expressing sophisticated, stylistic acuity. They can hang their wrist limply and people will think them more feminine. What is feminine for a man is what is somehow still masculine for a woman.

And when it does fit the criteria to be categorized as “female femininity,” it's plagued by the sense of compliance and orthodoxy. I crave the idea of my femininity being scandalous.

Femininity for women is conformity, but for men it's rebellious, it's a statement, it's complex, it's eloquence. My femininity could never be bold, not in the way it would be for a man.

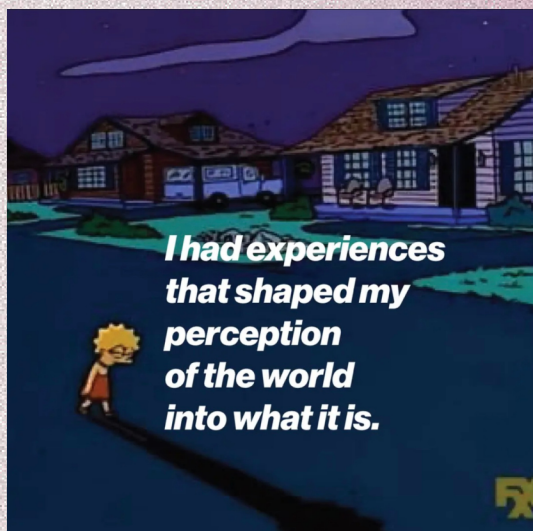
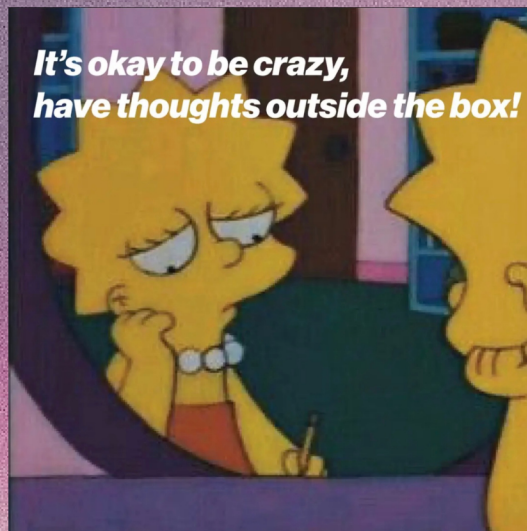
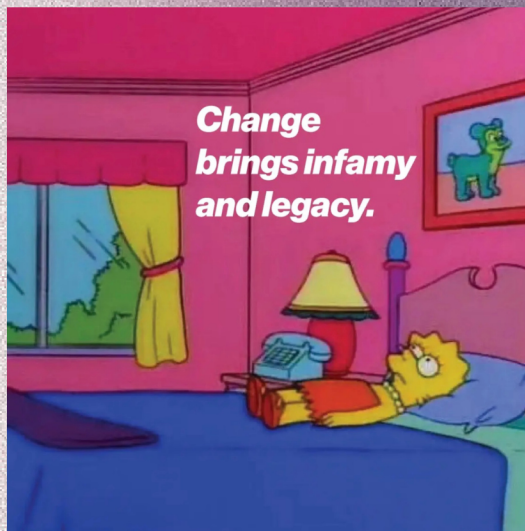
I envy them.





I WENT TO A Kombucha Party ONCE.

TikTok Slideshow
by @moike.io



Kombucha Party is a multimedia art piece reflecting the isolating point of view from a low-income person witnessing the on-going gentrification of New Brunswick, New Jersey.
(read left to right)

Best understood with:
Floe by Phillip Glass

▶ 24.3K

♥ 4170

💬 42

↩ 194

The reader, the
writer

The pessimist, the
optimist

The dancer, the
watcher

The feeler, the
thinker

Just as you teach me
how to cast darkness
with shadows,
Perhaps I can show
you how to illuminate
the night.

Please, never stop
showing me what you
see and telling me
what you think. I
value no one's word
as I do yours. I care
for no one's approval
as I do yours.

There's never
something we can't
learn from each
other. You perceive
the world quite
differently than me,
but I think just that
is why you were
made for me and I
for you.

A Letter to My Sister

BY ANONYMOUS



Mark Antony *and* Cleopatra

*by Ananya
Mehta*

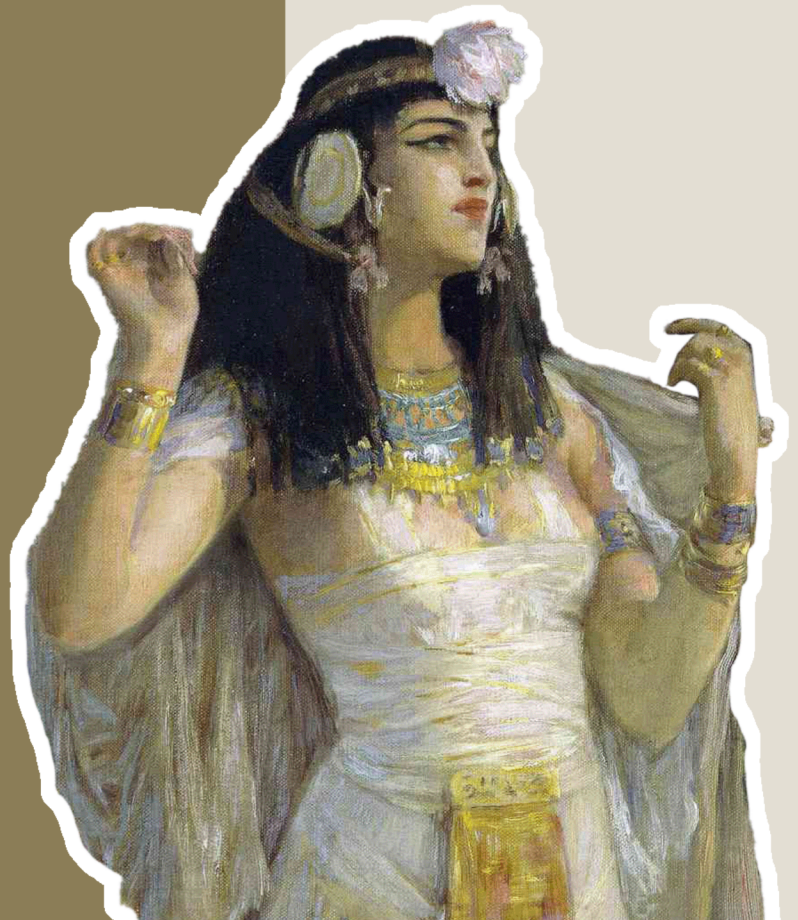
The air around smelled like freshly baked homemade bread, stroking her bare arms with a tenderness only a dying grandmother could provide. Each inhale traveled to her rigid joints releasing stored tension that her YouTube yoga tutorials struggled to track. Seriously, she felt great. Here she was, on her tippy-toes, capering from one asbestos-covered stair to another. The hallway was typically ominous, with pasty yellow walls peeling off its ancient structure. However, the flickering ceiling lamp only inspired her to add more flow to her dance up the stairs. Even the half-chewed circuits failed to trouble her. After all, Tony, her boyfriend of ten years, had arranged a date night after a tiresome year.

The Big Bang Theory will have had to synapse a hundred more times before she can explain what Tony meant to her. His innovative and meaningful dates only strengthened the devotion she felt toward him. In Year Eight, Tony secured a portion of Jamaica's iconic Seven Mile Beach for a candlelight dinner in the gorgeous twilight. She remembered thanking whichever probability equation controlled the universe for not turning her into a leaky faucet at that moment as her hormones had conquered her.

Tony was her world. Though, if asked anybody else, they would say Tony was the ringleader of the Surrealist movement. Obviously, he had eyes like everybody else. Rich hazel eyes that revealed a grainy desert with diseased cacti and carcasses of camels and rattlesnakes.

His diction was measly, but structured, as if he was storing his words in an impenetrable cage, like some divine offering only Tony knew about. His actions came with a premeditated number of steps to limit any distractions. During rough days, he would abstain from eye contact.

Her older brother swore Tony had scrapped the charming dork exterior that he adorably flaunted for nine years to finally manifest his destiny as a cheater. She knew better than to fall prey to her overprotective brother's taunts. Even on the most challenging days, she refused to consider Tony a cheater, even when his deeds eerily grazed the territories of deceit.



During Year Two, Tony sacrificed his Latin midterm even when he was offered the answer sheet ahead of time. Tony was not a cheater. He was passionate and devoted like her. Hence, they overcame hurdles like high school politics, long distance, and contrasting opinions on Selena Gomez's faulty singing abilities.

An electric blue door adorning a lemon wreath glistened against the kafkaesque cube-of-a-hallway, instructing her to pause her prance. She dug through her mini tote for red lipstick, which she patted on her lips, cheeks, and eyelids for good luck. With dilated eyes and rosy cheeks, she knocked. She knew the corridor to Tony's room was a lengthy walk and gathered her breath. Her Tony was back after a whole year.

Shuffled steps echoed in her ear. She exhaled and inched towards the door, hoping her hearty tackle would land on the plush rug instead of the glass coffee table.

"You know, you're wasting your time," a jagged voice derided, attempting to ground her shooting spirits. Unfortunately, she had grown familiar with the sneerer's sneers, or Caesar.

He was Tony's neighbor and biggest critic. Technically, Tony was the ideal neighbor since he barely threw parties and never created a commotion or asked for cups of sugar. But Caesar was the ideal hater. Ever since she begged him to screw the previously green door off its hinges, he had vowed verbal havoc on their lives. She couldn't blame him for the abuse. The shade of green complemented the hallway way more than the current blue, as it brought a subtle, but fun tone to the anemic yellow wall. Also, she forced Caesar to commit blasphemy on Sabbath Friday by howling, "Look at me! This isn't you!" at a fastened door. Until he brought out his tool kit and unscrewed each screw with an Allen key because of Tony. She considered it his form of grieving his mother, who succumbed to health regardless of his constant care and a medical degree.

"Sure. And you can't mind your own business. Consider us even," she responded. Returning her attention back to the flashy door, she swayed her arms side-to-side. The rusted doorbell caught her attention. She pressed her pointer finger to the compressed button and twisted her finger into the bell to secure a ring.

"This place is falling apart. The walls!" Caesar cried as he slapped his palm to the cleanest-looking panel of wood. "They are so thin. Skinner than Mariah," he whispered.

She narrowed her eyes at the lemon wreath. It was better to ignore Caesar, he was always looking for trouble and cheap gossip.





But, after failing to remember her credit score, explain why evolution should have stopped after the first *Homo Heidelbergensis* was born, and plan her next laundry, she gave in. “What’s your point?”

“I’m just saying, I heard Tony mumbling Cleo in his sleep last night. I didn’t know you went by Cleo. I mean, it’s way better than Octa. But you need to find a name that doesn’t sound like a twatty dog,” Caesar yapped. Suddenly, she felt a vibration in her ears like wasps were running laps around her head. Her sinuses clogged up when she inhaled the now stale air. Bitter shots of cortisol swam through her veins.

Usually, Octa would say she is content. No, really. She never complained about her hollow bank account when her card was declined at the local Starbucks. Octa’s nose never troubled her when her roommates compared it to Big Bird. Nor did she ever feel like ending it all when she resorted to an HR job after all the museums in the country rejected her application.

So, when Caesar mentioned Cleo, Octa wanted to honor her contentment by simply ignoring the nuisance the loony tune neighbor was displaying. Octa clasped her fingers together and imagined she was seeking the solace of a warm cup of chamomile tea. Instead, Caesar dropped an oxidized key in her pantomimed cup or interlocked fingers, deteriorating any semblance of peace she tried to muster. Sharply, Octa observed the key, then Caesar’s leer.

“It’s a spare key. I got it made after you guys decided on,’ Caesar pointed at the bright door, “that,” he spat. Octa looked down at the key.

She wanted to trust her faith in Tony. In Year Five, Octa had accidentally texted Tony’s late mother a mysterious text involving a shoddy motel, boxed wine, and “cute tushy.” Though the message had the framework for a scintillating affair, it was actually the party list for a bachelorette party. Between butt calls and drunk texting, the grocery store cashier warned Tony of Octa’s alleged double life as his mother wailed down the streets of their childhood neighborhood. Tony needed to see his Octa- to prove her innocence, of course. So he ran six miles to the nearest bus stop while hastily storing his groceries in his pockets. Only to turn back around when he accidentally sat on the banana in his back pocket.

“I can wait. It hasn’t even been five minutes,” Octa returned the key to Caesar. Just then, the sapphire door disappeared, revealing a polished living room and a lean man with stylistically messy hair and bright hazel eyes.

“Long time no see, Tony. Cleo’s here!” Caesar chimed. With one hand nudging the now brown-eyed man’s shoulder back inside the apartment, Octa shot a precise wave to Caesar.

“What’s he on?” Tony asked.

“Just ignore him,” Octa said while touching his fisted hand. She no longer saw masses of dust mites mingling with each other on books splattered on the once cherrywood floors or the TV screen, indignant grease smudges on the stovetops, and the pile of rotten socks spread across the living space.



Now, Octa focused on the abstract paintings on the burnt orange walls, the vintage stained lamp, and the green cloud couch, which was calling out her name.

“Octa,” Tony purred, “I have something for you,” he kissed her forehead and jogged into the oblivion of his bedroom. Octa allowed the comfort of the couch to suffocate her while waiting for Tony. As the fluff of the couch outlined her body, she planned her water intake to minimize redundant visits to the bathroom and spend the optimal amount of time with her bb. That was, till she felt a sharp jerk to her ribs. Eyes bolted shut and bull horns for eyebrows, Octa inspected the area with her blind palms. She desperately wished her ribs had toppled out of their bind. Only to feel the neck of a narrow glass bottle. Octa leaped off the couch’s clenched grip and seized the dark bottle with premade clawed hands.

She wanted to scream, cry, and laugh, all in sync. If possible, she needed to absolutely murder the bottle of balsamic vinegar resting in her clasp. The insignificant bottle had significantly dictated her life for three hundred and eighty days, or the last time Tony’s dead mother dropped off groceries. Unfortunately, Tony’s bond with his deceased mother rocketed into the exosphere as he chose to physically incubate the packaged vinegar after learning about fermentation through an Instagram post. Of course, everything about his intuition was eons away from the science of acidic fizzing. Her boyfriend’s mother’s untimely but appropriate death felt more like a planned gotcha than the holy liberation of a mama’s boy.



The insolent bottle mocked Octa’s competency and escaped her hold. Unlike Octa’s faith fragmenting into shards, the bottle remained unbothered from the freefall. It pirouetted like a graceful ballerina.

Consequently, Tony rushed to the murder scene. Stony eyes and razor-thin lips, Tony counted the bottle’s pompous whirls. “Cleo,” he gasped. Tony took a step closer to the physics-defying vinegar and froze.

“I haven’t spoken to her in days. I don’t even think about her. Trust me,” Tony pleaded. “Do you hear yourself?,” Octa hissed. She wished to be appalled, but this had become routine for the couple. Octa was about to open her mouth to deliberately misgender Cleo till a mini earthquake seized the walls. Caesar was eavesdropping from his apartment and decided to react in the form of banging on the wall that they shared.

“My turn! My turn! You can’t even ferment it. It’s been encased and shit, dumb ass,” Caesar guffawed through the walls sending more trembles to the apartment structure.

“Great, so I have been competing with grape for no reason. I was actually looking forward to using it,” Octa said, reaching for her tote bag.

Tony lowered his head and shook it continuously, like a child accused of stealing cookies. He marched to the vibrating wall and defeatedly thwacked it. He then dropped his eyes to Cleo or the floor.

To Octa, Tony's eyes weren't just random orbs balancing green and brown based on chemical firings and recessive genes. They reminded her of a kaleidoscope rearranging itself to any angle, radiation, and fervor. And each time his eyes glinted into a new impulse she painted an entirely new story revolving around them. This time, however, the story did not include Tony or Octa.

*“For the last
time, age
cannot wither
her, nor
custom stale
her infinite
variety,”*
Tony
mumbled.



In a family

by Mia Freeman

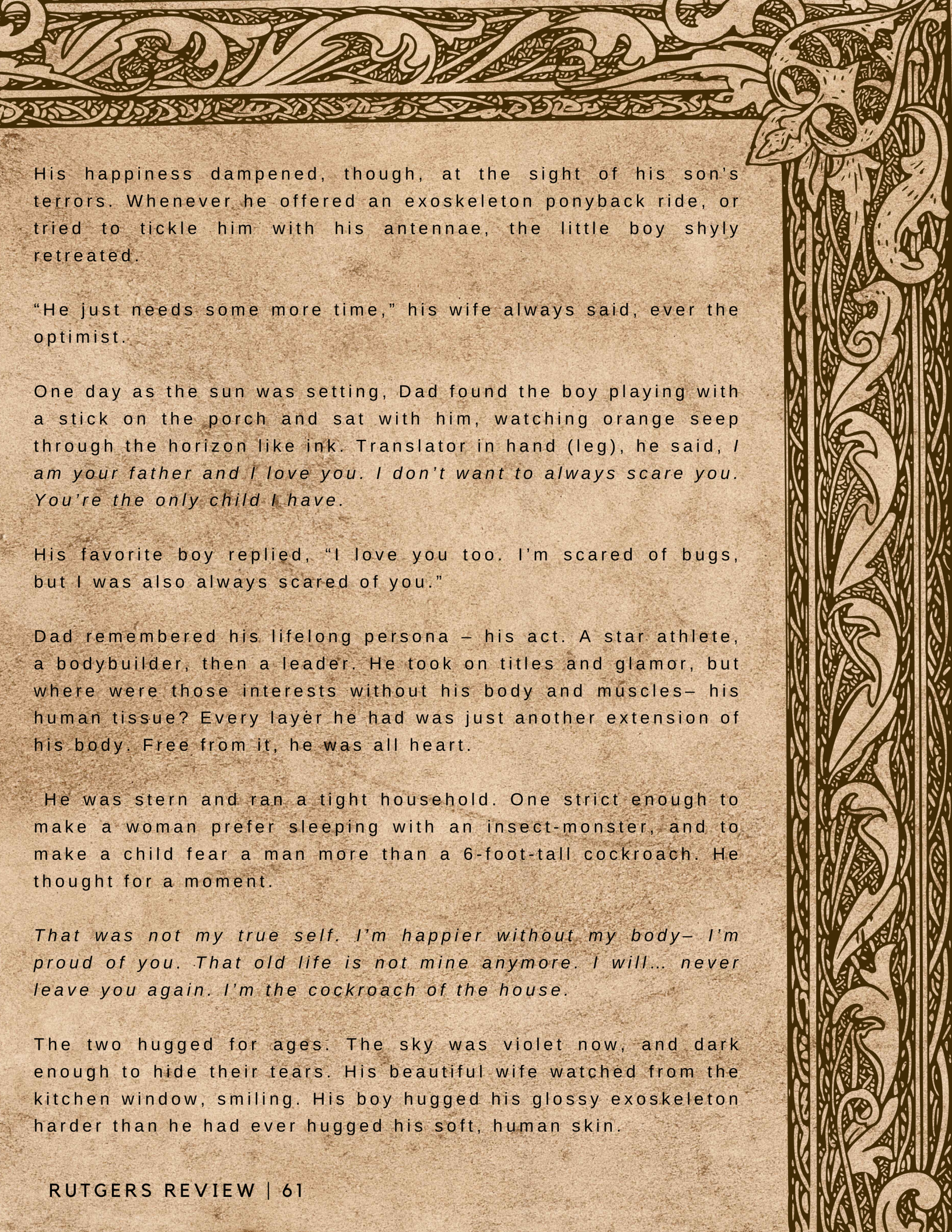
Dad came back from an 8-month deployment as a normal man, made of flesh and bone. He went to sleep in his own bed, next to his 31-year-old wife, for the first time in ages. He woke up the next morning as a giant cockroach. Screams ensued.

The doctor said it was a case of the Kafkaesque, which manifested in many ways, the metamorphosis being the most common. The possible causes? Monotonous work. His time cranking gears, filing paperwork, and grinding out tasks for eight months took a serious toll on his health. Dad was heartbroken. His wife and 5-year-old son needed time to adjust, for sure.



His wife had read “The Metamorphosis” in college and remembered what *not* to do in this kind of situation, thankfully. She treated her husband with kindness and understanding. She learned about cockroach diets, invested in a communicator for him on a tablet, fully accessible with insect legs and feelers, and found him a support group filled with others diagnosed with Kafkaesque. She did not mind his physical appearance, and even found it thrilling and interesting in their post-post-post-post-post-Honeymoon marriage.

Dad’s son, in contrast, had a debilitating fear of bugs. Dad, once strong and stoic, would have lectured this fear out of his child, but he had learned to love the joys of a six-legged life very quickly. He bumbled around cheerfully, went on annual trips to California with his support group (via cargo plane), and chirped happily at the dinner table. His most prominent features were once his towering height and abnormally large biceps, but that was overtaken by the gleeful open-close grin of his new mouth. He once kept his hair at a close, old-fashioned buzzcut, but now he sported whimsical antennae.



His happiness dampened, though, at the sight of his son's terrors. Whenever he offered an exoskeleton ponyback ride, or tried to tickle him with his antennae, the little boy shyly retreated.

"He just needs some more time," his wife always said, ever the optimist.

One day as the sun was setting, Dad found the boy playing with a stick on the porch and sat with him, watching orange seep through the horizon like ink. Translator in hand (leg), he said, *I am your father and I love you. I don't want to always scare you. You're the only child I have.*

His favorite boy replied, "I love you too. I'm scared of bugs, but I was also always scared of you."

Dad remembered his lifelong persona – his act. A star athlete, a bodybuilder, then a leader. He took on titles and glamor, but where were those interests without his body and muscles– his human tissue? Every layer he had was just another extension of his body. Free from it, he was all heart.

He was stern and ran a tight household. One strict enough to make a woman prefer sleeping with an insect-monster, and to make a child fear a man more than a 6-foot-tall cockroach. He thought for a moment.

That was not my true self. I'm happier without my body– I'm proud of you. That old life is not mine anymore. I will... never leave you again. I'm the cockroach of the house.

The two hugged for ages. The sky was violet now, and dark enough to hide their tears. His beautiful wife watched from the kitchen window, smiling. His boy hugged his glossy exoskeleton harder than he had ever hugged his soft, human skin.

/*****

*

* on being a girl in computer science

* @author amber safeer

*

*****/

```
1 public class girlInCompSci {
```

```
2
```

```
3     System.out.println("What do you want to be when you grow up?");
```

```
4
```

```
5 }
```

```
6 That's the burning question. It's all anybody ever asks you in high
7 school. To tell you the truth, I wanted to be an artist. I wanted to
8 be out there with the greats animating Into the Spiderverse, Puss in
9 Boots: The Last Wish, Nimona, and more. My passion lied with art. My
10 passion still lies with art to this day.
```

```
11
```

```
12 And yet here I am, majoring in computer science. Why?
```

```
13
```

```
14 Sometimes I still ask myself that question. I think perhaps that art
15 school was not the life for me, that pressuring myself to be
16 constantly creating would put a damper on my passion. I think
17 perhaps that there was a part of me that wanted to stay that smart
18 "gifted" kid, the one who would go into the sciences and become
19 something great. I think perhaps a part of me just wanted to pick
20 something that would help me survive after I graduated.
```

```
21
```

```
22 So I chose computer science, armed with no coding experience
23 whatsoever.
```

```
24
```

```
25 I am a sophomore now. Freshman year was difficult, especially
26 adjusting to the world of programmers. Especially adjusting to my
27 male friends who had already built websites, created personal
28 projects, and participated in their school's hackathons. Yet here we
29 sat, in the same lecture, learning the same material. They
30 understand it. I don't.
```


31 I am a woman sitting in a room of mostly men, hearing the laughs and
32 snide remarks as people whisper about their personal problems,
33 projects, and qualms with the course. For so long, it felt as if I
34 were miles behind everyone, trying to catch up in a seemingly
35 unwinnable race. Even now, a year later, I feel this way. I don't
36 have the free time that others do to study the material to the
37 extent I would like. I don't have the free time to learn how to make
38 my own video game or website. Hell, I barely have the time to
39 complete my assignments.

40

41 The worst part of it all? People look at you differently. My friends
42 have faith and confidence in me, but what does it mean when my own
43 professor doesn't? One asked me multiple times, "You did write this
44 code, right?" as if I came into office hours with an assignment I
45 didn't complete through my own sobbing tears weeks prior.

46

47 That's not even to mention the internship season. Career fair after
48 career fair, application after application, they all lead to
49 rejection. My friends are being offered interviews left and right,
50 while I sit here, writing this article, praying that something comes
51 my way. I ask myself that if I had known this was the career path I
52 had wanted to take a few years before, would it have been any
53 different? Would I have been granted the privilege of free time to
54 research and self-teach before I even entered college? Or would I
55 still have been looked down upon because I am a woman?

56

57 It's an ongoing battle in my head, but I put this piece forth to the
58 public for those who feel the same. For the people who feel like
59 they could never achieve the level of understanding or success that
60 their peers do. I understand you, and I see you.

61

62 However, I learned something all of those years that I pursued art
63 over the sciences. It doesn't do justice to compare yourself to
64 others and all that they have accomplished. Looking inward, at your
65 own progress, helps you to realize just how far you have come
66 despite the adversity. We are improving, whether it is obvious or
67 not. It is only a matter of time before we can give ourselves the
68 recognition we deserve.



by Ally Garcia

God created one of His many daughters
With a special and significant purpose:
To help and *heal* others.
She would be born in the spring,
He decided.
The time when His earth flourished,
His flowers bloomed,
and warmth would resume after the cold winter.

As the little girl grew, she resolved to grow her own garden.
She cultivated the land beneath her and raised many plants.
She patiently waited and watched them blossom into fruits, vegetables, and flowers.
She continued to take care of her plants and expand her garden.
She learned that if we take care of things, they last.
If we treat our treasures with kindness and care, they will prosper and live long lives.

Though before she created her garden, the girl faced several heartaches in her young life.
She cried frequently but saved her tears in a glass bottle.
“For later use,” she said.
As she continued to tend to her garden, she noticed an empty space on the earth.
“For later use...,” she remembered.
The girl withdrew her glass bottle and watered the empty space with her tears.
Eventually, she saw the fruit of her labor and produced a strong, deep-rooted, and beautiful cherry blossom tree.
The Tree of Life, she called it.
Oh, was her Father proud for she had turned her pain into beauty.
Her tree embodied her strength and eternal spirit,
Her vibrance and grace



~

One night, however, asleep in her garden,
God sent her a dream.
The girl dreamt of a large, formidable tree
in a wicked forest.

The tree was created by her shadow-self
and haunted by some of her ancestors.
The girl knew that her shadow-self's tears
watered this tree.

She knew that in this alternate world, she and her ancestors
were unhealed and her pain was a heavy burden.
As a result, her tears bred an evil-spirited tree that haunted
those who came near it.

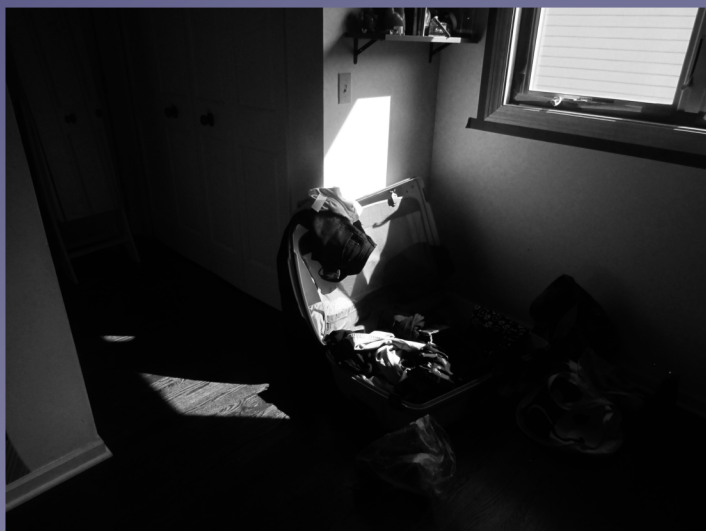
She awoke frightened, yet alive to the message
her Father had sent her.

The girl realized that if we don't heal and
properly deal with our pain, we will likely hurt ourselves
and others around us.

Thus, it is our moral obligation to heal ourselves,
so we can evolve as people and eventually help each other.
We can create something beautiful out of our hardships and spread
collateral beauty.

We can create our own trees of life
and help others create theirs.
At this, God will rejoice.

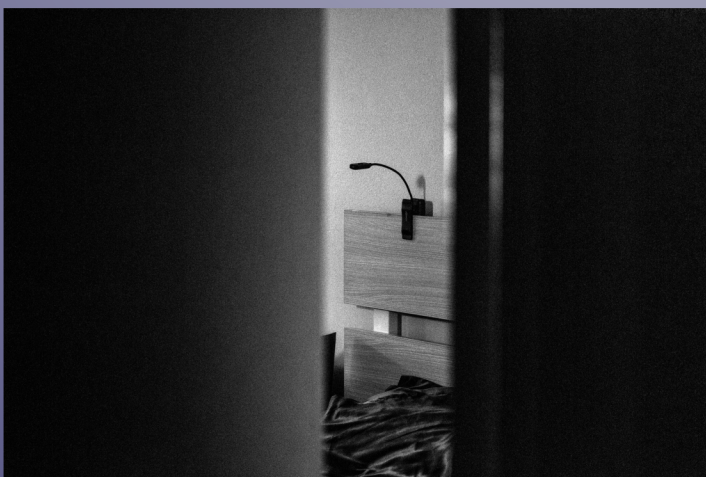




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